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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

In accordance with the multi-year programme of work for 2002-2006 of the Commission on the Status of Women, the present report analyses the enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, and presents challenges and opportunities for enhancing women's participation, including in the areas of education, health and work. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

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** The present report was submitted late to allow for the incorporation of inputs from the Expert Group Meeting.

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I. Introduction

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for 2002-2006,[1] at its fiftieth session, the Commission on the Status of Women will review the thematic issue of "Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work".

2. In order to contribute to a further understanding of this issue and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat, in collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), organized an Expert Group Meeting on the same theme in Bangkok from 8 to 11 November 2005. The outcome of the Meeting[2] has provided input for the present report.

3. The report provides an overview of challenges, opportunities and promising strategies for enhancing an enabling environment for gender equality and the advancement of women, with illustrative examples from the areas of education, health and work. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

II. Women's participation in development

4. In the Beijing Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Member States expressed their conviction that women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.[3] The Declaration also stressed that it was essential to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes, at all levels.[4] The Beijing Platform for Action noted that the full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels was a priority objective of the international community.[5] In the Political Declaration adopted at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, Member States pledged to undertake further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action, inter alia, through promoting full participation and empowerment of women.[6]

5. The Declaration on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women during the 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, held at its forty-ninth session in 2005, welcomed the progress made thus far towards achieving gender equality, stressed that challenges and obstacles remained and pledged to undertake further action to ensure full and accelerated implementation.[7] The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed that gender equality and the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all were essential to advancing development and peace and security.[8]

6. The preamble of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[9] stressed that the full and complete development of a

country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace required the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields. Article 7 required States parties to ensure that women had the right to participate in political and public life, including in elections, in government policy formulation and in non-governmental organizations. The provisions of articles 10, 11 and 12 of the Convention stipulated the legal commitments of States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure equal access and equal rights in education, employment and health.

7. In its examination of reports of States parties, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has noted that where there is full and equal participation of women in public life and decision-making, compliance with the Convention improves. The Committee has stressed the importance of a comprehensive approach to ensuring the implementation of Convention provisions, including through women's active participation in the areas of education, health and work. For example, the Committee recommended that Governments should involve women in the planning, implementation and monitoring of health policies and programmes and in the provision of health services to women.[10]

8. The Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality highlighted three critical dimensions of empowerment that affected women's enhanced participation in development: (a) equal capabilities, for example, as measured by education and health; (b) equal access to opportunities and resources, for example, to employment, economic resources, land and infrastructure; and (c) agency, for example, women's ability to claim their rights, participate in decision-making processes, for example, in political institutions, and exercise leadership.[11] Development in all three areas is required to ensure that women can be fully involved in, influence and benefit from development processes.

9. The nature and extent of women's participation in development, and the conditions under which such participation takes place, have been key concerns for Governments, the United Nations and other international and regional bodies, and the women's movement over the past decade. The Expert Group Meeting noted, however, that approaches to ensuring women's participation has often concentrated on increasing women's representation and had overlooked structural constraints, such as unequal gender relations, that limited women's potential to influence decisions and bring about change.

10. The Platform for Action made recommendations for enhancing women's participation in development through specific interventions on education, health and employment. These three areas are also key development priorities in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, with its focus on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. While a specific Millennium Development Goal on promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is a significant achievement, enhancing women's participation in development requires that gender perspectives be fully incorporated into the implementation of all Millennium Development Goals.

11. The 2005 World Summit resolved, inter alia, to eliminate gender inequalities *in primary and secondary education by the earliest possible date and at all*

educational levels by 2015; ensure equal access to reproductive health; promote women's equal access to labour markets, sustainable employment and adequate labour protection; and ensure equal access of women to productive assets and resources, including land, credit and technology.

12. Improved access to education and health services, and opportunities for work outside the household, are critical conditions for women's full participation in development. Post-primary education has strong positive effects on the health status of women and girls, including in relation to fertility and mortality.[12] Education and health are a necessary prerequisite for women's integration in the labour market. The higher the level of education attained, the more likely women are to have access to formal and better-paid employment, and the potential to make autonomous economic choices.[13] Conversely, increased economic empowerment through work is an entry point for access to further education and training, and higher-quality health services for women and their children. Education and health are also important sectors of employment for women.

13. The interlinkages among education, health and work can also result in multiple discrimination and inequalities. For example, lack of education and income continues to constrain women's ability to seek health care. HIV/AIDS increases the work burdens of women and girls, who provide up to 90 per cent of home-based HIV/AIDS care worldwide. It also affects girls' school attendance, leading to a higher level of dropouts, and has decimated the female labour force in sub-Saharan Africa, including in the public sector.[14] At the same time, access to education does not automatically translate into decent work and well-paid employment, if gender discrimination in the workplace persists through occupational segregation or unequal pay for work of equal value. Women's economic empowerment does not necessarily lead to enhanced decision-making in households and local communities. With unchanged divisions of roles and responsibilities within households, increased levels of paid employment for women may lead to double workloads.

III. Core elements of an enabling environment

14. The Platform for Action specifically noted the need for an enabling environment in relation to several critical areas of concern, including women and poverty, women and the economy, and the girl child, as well as in relation to institutional mechanisms and the mobilization of resources (see paras. 59 (g), 175 (c), 274 (a) and 350). The strategic objectives and specific actions under all 12 critical areas of concern contribute to building an enabling environment for gender equality and the advancement of women. The Political Declaration adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session explicitly reaffirmed Member States' commitment to strengthening and safeguarding a national and international enabling environment, and to this end pledged to undertake further action to ensure full and accelerated implementation, inter alia, through the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes and promoting full participation and empowerment of women and enhanced international cooperation (see Assembly resolution S-23/2, annex, para. 8).

15. An enabling environment would create the conditions necessary to eliminate inequality and discrimination against women and increase their access to decision-

making and control over resources such as land and economic assets, including through fully recognizing their contributions to public and political life, and their role as actors in the economy. It would include, inter alia, the development of policies and mechanisms with time-bound and measurable targets for implementation; legal and regulatory frameworks; gender-sensitive institutional frameworks; allocation of resources; and promotion of processes of sociocultural change.

16. The elements and dynamics of an enabling environment are context-specific. They are also influenced by factors such as, inter alia, the international political situation, including peace and security issues; the global and regional economic environment; the development of new technologies, for example, information and communication technologies (ICT); and environmental issues, such as natural disasters. Interventions are required at many different levels by a variety of actors. Change may be visible only over time; for example, the results of actions by Governments at national level through the adoption of policies, legal and regulatory frameworks may not be immediately felt at community and household levels and by individual women in their day-to-day lives. Explicit and sustained efforts are required to ensure full implementation of such frameworks. Mobilization for change in the enabling environment can also come from below, as evidenced in the dynamic role played by women's groups and networks at the local level over the past decade.

17. The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly noted that reforms were essential to ensuring women's equal access to institutions and organizations, and that institutional and conceptual changes were a strategic and important aspect of creating an enabling environment (see Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, para. 61). The primary importance of both formal and informal institutions in the creation of an enabling environment for gender equality and the advancement of women has also been highlighted in research on gender and development.[15] Formal institutional frameworks may comprise, for example, organizations and legislation, and informal institutions include sociocultural practices and value systems that govern relationships between individuals and groups. Formal and informal institutions define rights, control resource allocations, and assign roles and responsibilities to women and men in society. Such institutions can create, reflect and reproduce imbalances of power. Customary practices, for example, in relation to marriage and inheritance, and stereotypic attitudes and discriminatory behaviour may limit women's choices and opportunities in employment, education and training, and access to health services.

18. Health and education systems are core social institutions, which can contribute to an enabling environment through the delivery of indispensable public services, provided they function in a non-discriminatory manner. However, the access of many women and girls to health and education continues to be constrained, including by the lack of security and the risk of violence. As a result, they are unable to fully enjoy the benefits provided through these systems, which contributes directly to their experience of poverty.[16]

IV. Challenges to the creation of an enabling environment

19. The uneven progress in implementing the international commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women, and the large gap that remains

between policy and practice,[17] highlight the importance of a more coherent, integrated approach to ensuring an enabling environment.

20. The 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly revealed that Member States had taken positive steps to develop policies, adopt and review legislation and initiate programmes on gender equality and empowerment of women over the past decade. A number of factors at national level have limited, however, the effectiveness of these positive efforts, including a lack of coherence between overall national development policies and gender equality policies and strategies; continued underrepresentation of women in decision-making; insufficient protection and promotion of women's human rights; persistence of discriminatory sociocultural practices and attitudes; and violence against women. Other factors, such as globalization and armed conflict, have also created challenges to the achievement of an enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women, including in relation to education, health and employment.

21. Further challenges to the implementation of commitments to gender equality are related to institutional processes within organizations, such as a lack of political will and allocation of resources, lack of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and insufficient partnerships and coordination.

22. A major challenge for the creation of an enabling environment is the lack of integration of policies and mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women into national development policy frameworks and programmes. Many excellent policies and mechanisms developed to specifically promote and protect women's human rights and facilitate gender mainstreaming in all sectors remain marginalized and have limited impact. As a result, gender perspectives are not systematically taken into account in critical policies and strategies, such as national poverty reduction strategies, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and national Millennium Development Goal strategies.

23. Gender analysis is not used systematically and effectively in planning processes, as called for in the Platform for Action. The Expert Group Meeting noted that policies and programmes, as well as development cooperation interventions, might have limited or even adverse effects if they were not based on gender analysis and did not take into account gender inequalities in capabilities, access to assets and opportunities, and agency and decision-making power.[18] For example, in areas where girls make a major contribution to agricultural work, agricultural intensification policies that are not based on gender analysis may counteract policies on universal primary education and have a negative impact on access of girls to education.

24. Inadequate monitoring and accountability mechanisms for gender mainstreaming are persistent institutional obstacles to enhancing the enabling environment for women's participation. More reliable, relevant and timely sex-disaggregated data and qualitative information are required for gender analysis of impacts and the identification of areas needing improvement. Indicators are needed to track changes in norms, values and attitudes over time.[19]

25. Despite a worldwide general trend towards democratization since 1995, and recognition of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political

and public life, the 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action revealed that the gap between de jure and de facto equality in decision-making remained wide. This constitutes a critical challenge to the enabling environment. Although, according to the latest data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),[20] women's participation in parliaments is now the highest it has ever been (16 per cent across all parliaments), progress in the representation of women in political decision-making has been slow and uneven. Only 14 countries have at least 30 per cent representation of women in parliament, which had been established as a target for 1995 (see Beijing Platform for Action, para. 182).

26. Women's presence in decision-making bodies does not automatically ensure attention to gender equality in political processes. An increase in the numerical representation of women has to be complemented with increased opportunities to influence decision-making and outcomes. The accountability of all political actors, men as well as women, with respect to commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women is critical for ensuring gender-sensitive policy outcomes.

27. Lack of sex-disaggregated data on women's participation in decision-making in other areas, such as the economy, academia, the judiciary and the media, hinders systematic monitoring of progress.[21] Improved data are also needed on the access of women to management positions in the areas of health, education and employment in both the public and private sectors.

28. Lack of or limited enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms constitutes an impediment to the creation of an enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women. Despite almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women requiring States to ensure the practical realization of the principle of equality of women and men, discrimination against women in law and practice persists.[22] Furthermore, States have not yet fully taken into account their obligations under international human rights instruments in national development processes, including in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Project Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health, for example, has noted that key human rights principles would need to be applied within the area of health to ensure due attention to entitlements, accountability, claims, participation and voice.[23]

29. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action, attitudes to gender equality and empowerment of women have not changed as rapidly as policies and legal and institutional frameworks (E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1, para. 81). Stereotypic attitudes and discriminatory practices remain persistent challenges and continue to undermine important gains, including in the fields of education, health and work. In many parts of the world, such attitudes and practices restrict women's and girls' mobility, property rights, participation in decision-making, and access to economic and other livelihood opportunities.

30. Unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, for example, hinders the ability of women and girls to take advantage of primary, secondary and higher education and further education and training.[24] In some countries, early marriage and other customary practices perpetuate gender disparities in school enrolment and completion. Traditional harmful practices hinder

equitable access of women and girls to comprehensive and affordable quality primary health-care services, in particular reproductive health services. Obstacles such as inadequate family planning service provision, lack of responsiveness of service providers, and lack of education and information further hinder women's full access to health benefits. The lack of involvement of men and boys is an additional constraining factor. HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, for example, should take men's roles more fully into account in order to strengthen the ability of women and adolescent girls to negotiate consensual and safe sex.

31. Violence against women, which is a fundamental violation of women's human rights, remains pervasive in all parts of the world. Women experience violence throughout their life cycle, in both private and public spheres, and in many different forms and manifestations which range from domestic violence and harassment in schools to rape and sexual slavery in armed conflict.[25] Such forms of violence also impact negatively on women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights, including in the areas of health, work and education, and contribute to women's lower levels of education, skills and work opportunities.[26] Violence against women constitutes a major impediment to women's and girls' ability to make use of their capabilities, limiting their participation and agency in development, including in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.[27] It is therefore important to specifically address the linkages between violence against women and gender equality in the areas of education, health and work.

32. The links between violence, or fear of violence, and girls' and women's education should lead to more concerted and systematic preventive and remedial action. Parents cite violence, or fear of violence including sexual harassment by teachers, as key obstacles to sending girls to school. Similarly, violence in the home impacts negatively on the performance of girls in school as well as on women's educational achievements.

33. Violence against women is significantly correlated with a wide range of poor health outcomes. In addition to injury and fatality, these include manifestations of physical and mental illness and distress, pain, infection with the HIV virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. Violence against women also contributes to the overall burden of ill health and lack of well-being through its impact on women's physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health, as well as its impact on victims' families. The health sector, including all providers of health-related services, plays a critical role in the response to such violence, especially in identifying and providing assistance to victims of abuse.[28]

34. Estimates of the costs of violence against women include, beyond the personal loss of income to women, the broader economic effects of absenteeism, decreased labour-market participation and decreased productivity.

35. The Expert Group Meeting noted that globalization had presented a significant challenge to the creation of an enabling environment for gender equality and the advancement of women. Economic liberalization has had uneven impacts on women's participation in development processes (see the reports of the Secretary-General on the situation of women in rural areas (A/56/268 and A/58/167 and Add.1)). Benefits to women have included greater access to employment opportunities and access to ICT. However, decreased social protection and basic services in some areas have increased gender inequalities (see E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1, para. 43).

36. While many countries have made progress in improving access to education and health services for women and girls, the restriction of public expenditures in social sectors and increasing privatization of education and health services have in other cases increased the poverty of women and girls and hindered their integration in development processes.[29] Market-oriented service provision and focus on cost-effectiveness may limit choices, lead to lower quality of infrastructure and services, and reduce poor women's access to services. Many low-income women with no health insurance, including those working in the informal sector, cannot afford privatized and costly health systems.[30]

37. In some countries global restructuring processes, trade liberalization and foreign direct investment (FDI) have generated a broad range of labour arrangements and increased women's participation in the economy, inter alia, through part-time and temporary work, and self-employment. Such employment tends, however, to be insecure and characterized by a lack of social protection, especially for women migrant workers.[31] While ICT has created new types of work that may potentially benefit women, such as outsourcing and home-based work, there is still a wide gap between women and men in access to and usage of ICT in many countries.

38. Globally, women are over-represented in employment that is part-time and there are persistent wage gaps between women and men.[32] Both vertical and horizontal occupational sex segregation exists in all parts of the world, inter alia, as a result of gender inequality in education, training and recruitment, as well as of sociocultural attitudes and practices. There are continuing inequalities in access to decision-making in the economy.[33] Increasing numbers of women work under precarious conditions in the informal, unregulated economy with limited or no protection of their health and safety. The unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in the household and care economy persists and creates additional work burdens for women.

39. The enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women is seriously constrained in countries experiencing or emerging from armed conflict. Over the past decade, the negative impact of armed conflict on women and girls has been extensively documented.[34] Women and girls have become prime targets of armed conflict and have disproportionately suffered its impact, particularly sexual violence. Women also suffer serious threats to their health as a result of scarcity of food supplies and economic resources, lack of access to land, and disruption of traditional support systems. Education and health infrastructures may be damaged or destroyed; access to education and health services is restricted for security reasons, such as increased violence against women; and female school enrolment may decrease owing to the increased responsibilities of women and girls for food security. Rates of HIV/AIDS infection increase, inter alia, owing to increased sexual assault.

V. Opportunities and promising strategies

40. In the Declaration adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session, Member States pledged further action to ensure the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Measures for enhanced education, health and work for women were among the strategic priorities

for gender equality and empowerment of women identified by the 2005 World Summit (see General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 58). The 10-year review and appraisal identified a number of critical opportunities and promising strategies to enhance women's participation in development.

41. The 2005 World Summit recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality and Member States undertook to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres. Over the past decade, many countries have further refined their policies on gender mainstreaming and provided specific guidance on implementation in different sector areas, including health, education and employment. Action plans with time-bound, measurable benchmarks and targets have been developed to facilitate increased implementation of gender mainstreaming. In some countries, use of gender analysis has been made mandatory in planning and review processes and regular reporting on progress is required.

42. There is, however, recognition that efforts and resources for gender mainstreaming have to be significantly enhanced. There is a need to increase understanding of the mainstreaming strategy and ways to ensure systematic and effective implementation. Capacity for gender mainstreaming must be considered required competence at all levels within organizations. There has been considerable development of methodologies and tools, including for capacity-building, to support the incorporation of gender perspectives in policies, strategies and programmes in a range of sectors. Greater efforts should be made to ensure more systematic and effective use of existing approaches, methodologies and tools and enhanced sharing of lessons learned and good practices.[35]

43. Efforts to implement gender mainstreaming have been undertaken mainly at the programme level. There is a need for a stronger focus on gender mainstreaming in policy formulation. More explicit leadership on gender mainstreaming could ensure that policy and programme development in all sectors is systematically based on gender analysis. The Expert Group Meeting noted that where information obtained through gender analysis was used effectively and systematically, it could lead to tangible results at both policy and programme levels. For example, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) review of national Millennium Development Goal reports found that all reports that had identified the factors leading to inequalities in girls' primary education also included explicit commitments to reducing the gender gap.[36]

44. Innovations on gender mainstreaming in budget processes should be more broadly disseminated. Over the past decade, there has been an increased awareness of the importance of resource allocations at different levels for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. Many countries have undertaken initiatives to mainstream gender perspectives in budget processes in different sectors and a variety of tools and methodologies have been developed to support this work. Such initiatives aim to ensure that policy commitments on gender equality are aligned with resource allocations. Gender-responsive budget initiatives have, for example, pointed out the need to redirect spending within the education system so as to meet the needs of women[37] and have led to increased resource allocations to reproductive health.[38] Budget initiatives have also resulted in increased employment opportunities for women in infrastructure projects.[39]

45. Gender-sensitive budgets can increase resources for scaling up innovative and successful small-scale projects and investing in infrastructure in critical areas for women,[40] such as schools, health clinics, roads, water and sanitation. More-equitable access to credit is also critical for women's economic empowerment. Women farmers receive only a minor share of formal agricultural credit even in regions where they constitute the majority of producers, for example, in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.[41] While specific credit programmes for women have been important for enhancing women's entrepreneurship, greater efforts are needed to ensure women's access to mainstream credit programmes.

46. Improving the participation of women in decision-making was one of the priorities endorsed by the 2005 World Summit. Women's representation in parliament is also an indicator for achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In many countries, positive action measures, such as quotas for women in elections, have resulted in increases in women's participation and these good-practice examples should be disseminated and replicated. In a number of countries, there has also been a significant increase in participation at local government levels over the past decade. Studies have shown that women's representation in local decision-making bodies has increased attention to schools, health care, housing and infrastructure.[42]

47. A further encouraging development is that a number of post-conflict countries appear among the top 30 countries with regard to women's participation in legislative bodies, with the level of representation of women legislators averaging between 25 and 30 per cent.[43] Many of these countries have recognized the importance of including women in their reconstruction processes and of their active participation in new democratic institutions. In Rwanda, women now hold almost 50 per cent of seats in the national parliament, currently the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world.[44] Concerted efforts have to be made to ensure an enabling environment for women's effective participation and positive impact on policy outcomes.

48. One important strategy for enhancing the enabling environment for gender equality would be to more directly and explicitly link the legal and policy frameworks for promoting gender equality. Greater advantage should be taken of the synergies between the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on the one hand, and the Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the United Nations Millennium Declaration (see General Assembly resolution 55/2), on the other. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has emphasized that the full and effective implementation of the Convention is indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals should therefore be based on States' obligations under the Convention, and should also specifically respond to the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Similarly, implementation of the commitments undertaken by Member States under the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action can directly support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at national level.

49. Law reform efforts to eliminate discriminatory laws and to revise laws that have a discriminatory impact also contribute to enhancing an enabling environment

for gender equality and empowerment of women. Use of temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25,[45] can accelerate implementation of the Convention and the achievement of substantive gender equality. Institutional support and capacity-building measures, for example, training of the judiciary on national-level implementation, as well as increasing means of redress, including through ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 54/4, annex), should be pursued as priority strategies.

50. Discriminatory sociocultural norms and practices and stereotypic roles of women and men need to be addressed as a matter of priority so as to create an enabling environment. Alliances with the media and other opinion-makers have proved successful in facilitating change in societal attitudes towards women and promoting positive images of equality between men and women. Media campaigns have stressed, for example, the importance of education for girls and the elimination of domestic violence (see E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1, para. 419). Working with community leaders is an important strategy for redressing gender power imbalances and entrenched ideas of women's roles, including through sensitization on the importance of women's participation in decision-making at community and household levels.

51. The involvement of men and boys as partners for gender equality is critical for women's enhanced participation in development. The principle of equality between women and men and girls and boys should be integral to socialization processes. Shared responsibility of women and men for families should be actively promoted to ensure women's improved access to education and employment opportunities. Further innovative measures are needed to increase men's involvement in promoting gender equality in the workplace, including in decision-making; to strengthen reproductive health programmes that strive for safe and consensual sexual relations and promote equal responsibility for the prevention of HIV/AIDS;[46] and to enhance the involvement of men and boys in combating violence against women and girls.

52. Education and training programmes and critical reviews of school curricula, textbooks and other information and communication materials are important means of challenging stereotypes or rigid models of masculinity and femininity and to providing alternatives to stereotypic male identities and relationships. Public information campaigns that have targeted young men and boys and, for example, underlined the need for men and boys to share household and family responsibilities, have also presented important opportunities. Resources for gender equality initiatives targeting men and boys must not, however, compromise equal opportunities and resources for women and girls.

53. A significant development noted in the 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action was the increased diversity in the mechanisms established at national level to promote and monitor attention to gender equality and empowerment of women, including — in addition to traditional national machineries such as women's ministries — gender equality commissions, ombudspersons offices and parliamentary networks and caucuses. A significant number of countries have established gender units or gender focal points in line ministries and other bodies to promote and monitor gender mainstreaming in a wide range of areas, such as agriculture, education, health, human rights, finance,

security, justice and trade. There has also been an increase in the number of offices and focal points established at municipal, district and provincial levels to address gender equality issues.

54. In many countries, national machineries have played a key role in promoting and facilitating legal reforms, development of monitoring mechanisms, data-collection and indicator development, capacity-building, and public awareness campaigns on gender equality and empowerment of women. They have established alliances with strategic partners, such as women's groups and networks and the private sector. The contribution of national machineries to the creation of an enabling environment could, however, be significantly enhanced. National machineries must be fully integrated into policymaking at all levels of government. In some countries, national machineries would require increased resources, authority and capacity to be able to systematically promote and support gender mainstreaming and initiate effective measures for the empowerment of women and girls. Increasing access to and capacity to utilize ICT systematically and effectively would offer a strategic opportunity for enhancing the impact of national machineries.

55. The role of civil society has been critical in the creation of an enabling environment over the past decade. Women's groups and networks have played a very strategic role in moving the global agenda on gender equality and advancement of women forward and strengthening implementation at national level. A great deal of the sustained attention and achievements at national level have been due to their advocacy and monitoring efforts. Women's organizations have contributed to increasing the recognition of the importance of gender equality for development in a wide range of areas, for example, financing for development, infrastructure and HIV/AIDS. They have increased attention to violence against women and girls worldwide through major public awareness initiatives and campaigned for women's rights in the field of education, health and employment.

56. Many Members States have recognized the critical role of non-governmental organizations in awareness-raising, advocacy, monitoring and, in some contexts, programme delivery. The increasing partnerships between Governments and civil society on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment constitute a positive development.

57. Innovative partnerships are also needed among national mechanisms for gender equality, other government bodies, including national statistical offices, the women's movement, the private sector, and regional and international organizations. National machineries and women's organizations have, for example, worked together to ensure that national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) pay increased attention to improving women's health and education.[47] Increased interaction between women's organizations and other civil society actors, such as social movements and environmental groups, can strengthen women's voices, provide access to new resources, and lead to strategic alliances in advocating for policy change. Enhanced partnerships with academic institutions would also provide strategic opportunities, particularly since the constraints on gender-sensitive policy formulation and programme implementation include lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis.

58. The use of ICT is an important resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including through creating new economic opportunities. Women however,

have, significantly less access to ICT in many countries, and occupational segregation in the ICT sector hinders the contribution of ICT to an enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women. New strategies must focus on enhancing women's equal access to and effective use of ICT for development through training and infrastructure provision; increasing women's involvement in the production of content that is relevant for women's needs and priorities, for example, in relation to health, education and employment; ensuring women's equal participation in management and decision-making positions in ICT policymaking and regulatory bodies; and combating misuse of ICT for sexual exploitation.[48]

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

59. **Enhancing the enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women requires systematic efforts to strengthen the capabilities of women and girls as measured by health and education status; to increase their access to assets and opportunities, for example, through employment; and to enhance their agency through representation and participation.**

60. **The creation of an enabling environment is both a political and a technical process. Critical factors include the development of policies and mechanisms with time-bound and measurable targets for implementation; the establishment of legal and regulatory frameworks and gender-sensitive institutional frameworks; sufficient allocation of resources; and promotion of sociocultural change processes.**

61. **Challenges to the creation of an enabling environment that need to be specifically addressed include the lack of coherence between national development policies and gender equality policies and strategies; the gap between policy and implementation; the underrepresentation of women in decision-making; insufficient protection and promotion of women's human rights; discriminatory sociocultural practices and attitudes; and persistent violence against women. Institutional challenges include a lack of political will and resources; inadequate implementation of gender mainstreaming; insufficient mechanisms for monitoring and accountability; and lack of coordination and strategic partnerships.**

62. **Full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly requires a comprehensive multisectoral approach, with emphasis on the areas of health, education and employment.**

63. **The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to recommend the following action by Governments, international organizations, including the United Nations, civil society and other relevant stakeholders:**

(a) **Incorporate gender perspectives into national development strategies for the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, through, inter alia, fully utilizing existing gender equality policies and strategies;**

(b) **Integrate gender perspectives, and explicit reflection of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in all efforts aimed at the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;**

(c) **Increase attention to gender perspectives in all national planning and reporting processes and mechanisms, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Millennium Development Goals reports;**

(d) **Increase understanding of and capacity to utilize gender mainstreaming, including by, inter alia, requiring the use of gender analysis as the basis for all policy and programme development;**

(e) **Disseminate and replicate innovations in gender mainstreaming approaches, such as gender-responsive budget processes and mandatory gender analysis in planning and review processes, in particular in the areas of health, education and employment;**

(f) **Develop effective monitoring mechanisms, including through the collection, compilation and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics, and the development and use of appropriate indicators, including process indicators;**

(g) **Develop strategies to increase women's participation in decision-making in all areas, including in political bodies, economic institutions, academia and the media, and regularly collect and compile data to monitor progress;**

(h) **In the implementation of the obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, utilize fully the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which reinforce the provisions of the Convention;**

(i) **Integrate targeted measures to eliminate violence against women in all national development policies and strategies, in particular in the areas of education, health and work;**

(j) **Take measures to ensure the elimination of gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and practices, including in the delivery of health services and education programmes and in the workplace;**

(k) **Develop strategies to increase the involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, through, inter alia, promoting responsible sexual relations and the sharing of parental leave and care and household work;**

(l) **Ensure adequate funding for gender-sensitive development policies and programmes and for national mechanisms for gender equality, through national, regional and international resource mobilization and gender-responsive budget processes in all sector areas;**

(m) **Encourage enhanced coordination and collaboration among all national mechanisms for gender equality, including, inter alia, women's ministries, gender equality commissions, ombudspersons and gender focal points in line ministries, as well as with women's groups and networks;**

(n) Increase women's equal access to and effective use of ICT through training and infrastructure provision; involvement in the production of content; and participation in management and decision-making positions in ICT regulatory or policymaking bodies.

64. In the areas of education, health and employment, the Commission on the Status of Women may wish to recommend the following action by Governments, international organizations, including the United Nations, civil society and other relevant stakeholders:

Education

(a) Require all educational institutions to put in place policies aimed at preventing violence and harassment of girls and women, which include complaints mechanisms, and monitor the effectiveness of such policies;

(b) Provide training for teachers on gender stereotypes, and work with communities to address the underlying causes of inequality and discrimination;

(c) Eliminate gender bias in curricula, methodologies and teaching practice that perpetuate gender inequalities;

(d) Develop specific curricula and materials on gender equality for both boys and girls at all levels of education;

(e) Increase the access of girls and women to education and training on science and technology, including on ICT;

Health

(f) Incorporate gender perspectives and attention to women's specific health needs and priorities, including sexual and reproductive health, in health sector reforms;

(g) Develop a comprehensive health sector response to the various impacts of violence against women, which addresses, among other challenges, the reluctance of many abused women to seek assistance;

(h) Use the potential of the reproductive health services as entry points for identifying women in abusive relationships and for delivering referral and support services;

(i) Ensure that health education addresses women's needs and priorities throughout the life cycle, including sexual and reproductive health;

(j) Develop strategies to increase consultation with and involvement of women, including through national mechanisms for gender equality and women's groups and networks, in the planning, implementation and monitoring of health policies and programmes, so as to ensure increased attention to the health priorities and needs of women across the life cycle, in particular in relation to sexual and reproductive health;

Work

(k) **Initiate or strengthen existing measures to promote work-life balance for both women and men;**

(l) **Provide incentives for innovative measures at the workplace to achieve gender equality, for example, promoting positive action, provisions for parental leave for women and men, childcare facilities and gender-responsive pension schemes;**

(m) **Eliminate occupational segregation and gender wage gaps, including by increasing opportunities for women and girls for work in non-traditional sectors, inter alia, through technical education and vocational training;**

(n) **Develop or strengthen strategies to enhance women's participation in managerial positions and collect data on a regular basis to monitor progress;**

(o) **Improve and diversify opportunities for women entrepreneurs, including through increased access to education and training, information, credit and ICT.**

Notes

[1] Adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2001/4.

[2] Report of the Expert Group Meeting: Enhancing participation of women in development through an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, Bangkok, 8-11 November 2005 (available from http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/enabling-environment2005/index.html).

[3] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I, para. 13.

[4] Ibid., para. 19.

[5] Ibid., annex II, para. 10.

[6] General Assembly resolution S-23/2, annex, para. 8.

[7] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 7* (E/2005/27), chap. I, sect. A, para. 1.

[8] See General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 12.

[9] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

[10] General recommendation 24, para. 31 (a) (see *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/54/38/Rev.1), part one, chap. I, sect. A).

[11] United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women* (London, Earthscan, 2005), p. 3.

[12] Ibid., p. 37 ff.

[13] E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1, para. 149.

[14] International Labour Organization (ILO), "Women, girls, HIV/AIDS and the world of work", ILO AIDS Brief, December 2004, p. 4.

[15] See, for example, J. Jütting and C. Morrison, "Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries", Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Policy Brief, No. 27, 2005.

[16] Millennium Project Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health, *Who's Got the Power? Transforming Health Systems for Women and Children* (London, Earthscan, 2005), p. 95 ff.

[17] E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1, paras. 77-81.

[18] Cf. C. Pinder, "Evaluation of DFID development assistance: gender equality and women's empowerment, phase II thematic evaluation: enabling environment for growth and investment", Department for International Development Working Paper 10, February 2005.

[19] Jütting and Morrison, loc. cit., p. 6.

[20] Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Women in politics: 1945-2005", information kit, Geneva. See also "Map of Women in Politics: 2005", prepared as a collaboration between IPU and the Division for the Advancement of Women; and IPU, "The participation of women and men in decision-making: the parliamentary dimension", background paper prepared by IPU for the Expert Group Meeting on "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership" (EGM/EPWD/2005/BP.1), Addis Ababa, 24-27 October 2005.

[21] Women's participation in decision-making is dealt with more comprehensively in the report of the Secretary-General to the Commission at its fiftieth session entitled "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels" (E/CN.6/2006/13).

[22] See also the statement of the Committee to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention (CEDAW/C/2005/I/4, annex III).

[23] *Who's Got the Power* ..., p. 33 ff.

[24] *Taking Action* ..., p. 4 ff.

[25] Ibid., p. 111 ff.

[26] See General recommendation 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/47/38), chap. I).

[27] Prior to the 2005 World Summit, the Division for the Advancement of Women organized a consultation on "Galvanizing action to combat violence against women", at United Nations Headquarters on 6 and 7 September 2005, to highlight the linkages between violence against women and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to identify key issues to be addressed in the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women (information is available from http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/consultation_galvanizing.htm).

[28] World Health Organization, *WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes, and Women's Responses* (Geneva, WHO, 2005).

[29] *Who's Got the Power* ..., p. 39 ff.

[30] Ibid., p. 107 ff.

[31] United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.III.Y.1), p. 67 ff.

[32] United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty* (New York, 2005), p. 6 ff.

[33] ILO, *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management* (Geneva, ILO, 2004).

[34] See Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); and *Women, Peace and Security* (United Nations publication Sales No. E.03.IV.1).

[35] The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Measures taken and progress achieved in the follow-up to and implementation of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly: review of progress made in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and

programmes" (E/CN.6/2006/2) provides illustrative examples of mainstreaming gender perspectives into areas of education, health, work and decision-making.

[16] UNDP, *En Route to Equality: A Gender Review of National MDG Reports* (New York, UNDP, 2005), p. 16.

[17] See D. Budlender, "The South African Women's Budget Initiative" (New York, UNDP, 1998).

[18] See, for example, for the United Republic of Tanzania, M. Fleshman, "Gender budgets seek more equity", *Africa Recovery*, vol. 16, No. 1 (April 2002), p. 4.

[19] UNIFEM, "Gender responsive budgets: programme results (2001-2004)" (New York, UNIFEM, 2005), p. 4.

[20] *Taking Action* ..., p. 104 ff.

[21] *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice* ..., p.105.

[22] *Taking Action* ..., p. 105 ff.

[23] See IPU, "Women in politics ..."; and "The participation of women and men in decision-making ...".

[24] IPU, "Women in politics ...".

[25] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/59/38), part one, annex I.

[26] UNFPA, *It Takes 2: Partnering with Men in Reproductive and Sexual Health* (New York, UNFPA, 2003), pp. 24-28.

[27] *Taking Action* ..., p. 139 ff.

[28] Division for the Advancement of Women, "Women 2000 and beyond: gender equality and empowerment of women through ICT", September 2005.